



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Lord's Prayer James Tissot (1886-1896)
from the series *The Life of Christ*, Brooklyn Museum



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy upholds the importance of prayer in the Christian life.
- ▶ Today gives us the rare opportunity to focus solely on the prayer that Jesus taught us and that is an integral part of every Eucharistic Liturgy.
- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Genesis 18:20-32

- ▶ Today's reading invites us to revisit the infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- ▶ Through the ages the two cities have come to symbolize depravity. Scholars are not sure whether their infamy is due to their lack of hospitality or a result of sexual promiscuity.
- ▶ The focus of today's reading is God's judgment and Abraham's intercession on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- ▶ Abraham is faithful and persistent in his prayers.
- ▶ Last week we were given a glimpse of the intimacy Abraham shared with God. God visited Abraham and Abraham extended lavish hospitality upon God.
- ▶ He was, therefore, confident that God would hear and answer his prayer.
- ▶ God promised Abraham that he would spare the people if Abraham could find righteous people in the cities. Sadly the cities were so perverse that none could be found.
- ▶ This story not only became symbolic of the world's depravity (Sodom and Gomorrah), but it has also been symbolic of God's retribution and judgment.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How do you feel about a God who would destroy a city over the sin of its people? Is that the God you know? Who is the God you know?
- ▶ While our own sinfulness can bring about our own destruction, God does not set out to destroy the sinner. While God does show mercy in the end in this story, the

image of God in the New Testament portrays God in far more merciful terms. Jesus reminded the crowd that the man born blind was not blind because of God's retribution. Yet even today people can still get caught up in the notion that God caused their suffering as a result of their sinfulness. We hear, "What did I do to deserve this?" as a common refrain when calamity hits. How do you feel about such a notion? Do you believe God causes bad things to happen because of people's sinfulness?

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

Second Reading: Colossians 2: 12-14

- ▶ Paul's continuing theme resonates throughout his letter to the Colossians. He cannot state it enough: through baptism we are incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus—we are incorporated into his Paschal Mystery. The letter to the Romans (Ch. 6) is a catechism on that theme par excellence. We hear it proclaimed each year at the Easter Vigil: "Are you not aware, brothers and sisters, that you have been baptized into Christ's death?"
- ▶ Today's reading was probably a hymn or a prayer used in liturgy.
- ▶ This letter makes the assumption that our resurrection in Christ is already a reality.
- ▶ Baptized Christians are living in the resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ The "bond" (v. 14) that was canceled is probably a reference to the debt that we ourselves can never repay to God as a result of our sinfulness.
- ▶ Jesus paid the debt for us. He atoned for our sins on the cross.
- ▶ Paul insisted that those who believed that they could only pay their debt to God for sin through strict observance of the Law are misguided. Such a premise suggests that we can save ourselves. Human beings cannot atone for their own sinfulness—God had to send his Son to atone for human sin through his death on the cross.
- ▶ Paul was laying bare the aberrant philosophies that were threatening the Gospel and his community. Some falsely believed in a super human being more powerful than Christ as well as in circumcision and strict observance of the Law.
- ▶ Paul insists that salvation is only through the death and resurrection of Christ. All else is false.
- ▶ The covenant with Abraham is superseded by the covenant with Christ through his sacrificial death.
- ▶ Baptism replaced circumcision as a sign of incorporation into God's life. Christian circumcision is baptism and as such it frees the sinner from the effects of sin.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Why is Paul so adamant in his challenge of the Jewish belief that a person is righteous only by faithful and strict adherence of the Law?
- ▶ Why does he think that such a belief is dangerous for the Christian?
- ▶ Paul’s message is that salvation is achieved through participation in the cross of Christ. What does that mean to you? How are you presently participating in the cross of Jesus Christ?
- ▶ Paul’s assumption in the letter to the Colossians is that the people are already living in the resurrection—what does that mean to you? How are you living in the resurrection of Christ?
- ▶ How can we appropriate Paul’s message in our lives today? What are the implications of what Paul is teaching the Colossians?

Gospel: Luke 11: 1-13

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus presents his catechism on prayer. Luke’s Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord’s Prayer.
- ▶ The Christian tradition has handed down two versions of the Lord’s Prayer. One version emanated from the Jewish Christian community in Matthew’s Gospel and the other came from the Gentile Christian community in Luke’s Gospel.
- ▶ Each version had its own unique focus.

Matthew’s Lord’s Prayer

- ▶ Matthew’s version was eschatological—it was concerned with last things and the end of the age, whereas Luke’s version was more present centered.
- ▶ Matthew’s version looked to the end of the age, a future eschatological day. The prayer pleaded for that day to arrive. On that day all people would acknowledge God’s sovereignty over the created order, especially over human beings.

- ▶ Since this was a future, heavenly kingdom, “daily bread” referred to in the prayer was understood as spiritual food (which is why the Lord’s Prayer is a perfect preparation in the Mass for Holy Communion).
- ▶ The “deliver us from evil” was a request to be delivered and protected in the final battle between Good and Evil at the end of the world.
- ▶ The Lord’s Prayer is the prayer of all believers—it is the prayer of the community.
- ▶ The focus is not on the individual but on the proverbial “we/us.” The community prays for the future coming of the “day of the Lord” and prays for God to send that day quickly. The community prays to be sheltered by God’s protection on that awesome, terrible and holy day.

Luke’s Lord’s Prayer

- ▶ Luke, on the other hand, is more concerned with the reign of God, here and now as we await the kingdom yet to come.
- ▶ He exhorts believers to pray for the kingdom to arrive, here, now and in this place.
- ▶ “Daily bread” is a request that God provide everything that is necessary to sustain us both spiritually and physically.
- ▶ Luke’s prayer hints at the eschatological age, but is veritably more concerned with the kingdom of God that is to be established in this plane of existence.
- ▶ Luke deliverance prayer seeks deliverance from the daily temptations that continue to ensnare us each and every day.
- ▶ The prayer asks that we keep our focus on God and not get caught up in worldly concerns and thus miss the work of the Spirit and by extension the kingdom of God. It is the Holy Spirit’s role to inaugurate the kingdom. Luke’s Jesus’ cautions believers to pray that they not be so distracted that they miss what God was doing in their midst.
- ▶ Jesus teaches his disciples what they need to do to go forward to continue his mission when he is gone and he teaches them what they should pray for, thus illustrating the pitfalls they will encounter. They are to pray for daily sustenance, for the power to resist temptation, for the Holy Spirit to come, for the realization of God’s kingdom and God’s ultimate victory over the power of evil.
- ▶ Jesus wants to communicate the necessity for prayer, the power it provides and the ongoing strength to continue the mission that prayer affords. They are to pray always.

Parables

- ▶ Luke’s Jesus puts an exclamation point on his exhortation about prayer by telling a story—by sharing parables.
- ▶ The parables are known as “how much more” parables.
- ▶ Jesus’ continues his teaching on prayer by providing further reasons for persistence.
- ▶ Consider the scenario--a neighbor brazenly continually knocks on the door of his neighbor’s house until the neighbor (though loathe to do so) finally answers the door. If the reluctant neighbor finally responds, “how much more” will God, who loves his faithful children, respond.
- ▶ In other words, God does answer persistent prayer.

- ▶ The second “how much more” parable in the reading is the suggestion that no father would give his child a snake when the child asks for bread. The listener is invited to make the parallel that if a father would answer the child’s request, “how much more” they can expect our heavenly Father to similarly answer ours. Bottom line? Keep praying!
- ▶ If it is true that a father loves his child so much he wants only the best for that child and only desires to gift him good things, not harmful things, “how much more” does God desire to give us good things—“good gifts”, a reference to the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Groups were identified by the way they prayed. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray they were asking him to give them an identity.
- ▶ Jesus told them to be bold in their prayer—to have a little moxy. Anything *worth its gold* is worth audaciously *going for the gold*!
- ▶ Luke’s Jesus tells his disciples they are not to take “no” for an answer. They are to keep at it until God hears and answers.
- ▶ Jesus reminds the disciples that the intimate relationship he shares with his Father is the same intimate relationship he (Jesus) shares with them.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the one ultimate theme in this Gospel? How does Jesus emphasize that theme?
- ▶ Do you pray with the kind of trust that is expected in this Gospel today? Do you pray with the same expectant faith that Jesus suggests?
- ▶ What are the implications to the persistence in prayer he preaches?
- ▶ Why does Jesus tell them exactly what they should pray for? What does that have to do with your life today?
- ▶ What are some obstacles to the kind of prayer that Jesus calls for in this Gospel?
- ▶ What happens to your faith when answers to your prayer are not forthcoming? What then?
- ▶ Are you as persistent in prayer as this Gospel suggests? If not why not? If so, what has been your experience of such persistence?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about God’s relationship with us?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. When the hurricanes came through Florida the insurance adjuster came to our house and told us that we were victims of five hurricanes that year because God was angry with Florida over gay pride day at Disney World and due to the banning of a symbol of the Ten Commandments in a public place. This man's premise was absolutely absurd. It is as though he never heard of the New Testament. Yet he is not alone in his ridiculous perspective.

His assertion taken to the extreme echoes the retribution for sin that is expressed in today's reading. The first reading simply is making the point that God will judge us. We will stand in judgment for our sins at the final judgment. God is, nevertheless, a merciful God.

My image of God does not make room for a God who destroys an entire city—innocent children and all. The ancient peoples understood everything in their world to be a result of God's action—the good and the bad. The good was a reward for good behavior and the bad was punishment for sin. Jesus challenged that theology when he reminded the people that the man's blindness was not a result of sin and that those who fell off the tower and were killed were not killed as a result of divine retribution. Jesus introduced us to a merciful, compassionate and loving God. Yes we will be judged according to the way we have lived the Gospel—or not. But Jesus showed us the face of his Father—he gave us an image I treasure far more than the image we are left with in this story in the Book of Genesis (cultural understanding of God's role in everyday life in antiquity notwithstanding).

#2. Paul's assumption in the letter to the Colossians is that Christians are already living in the resurrection of Christ. How does that play out in my life?

It plays out in my life in the joy and hope I have that Christ lives within. We talk so much about the cross of Christ, but it is, in truth, the resurrection that ensured our salvation. Jesus had to return to his Father before we would ever be given access to resurrection living and eternal life.

We believe that the Spirit of Christ lives within us—that is what it means to live in the resurrection of Christ. No matter what sorrow we experience, we live in the resurrected hope that death will not have the last word.

A friend and I were once sharing about the joys and sorrows of raising a family. She had six children. She was a consummate optimist. She believed there was nothing that could not be fixed without a little hope, faith and trust that God would see her through. She told me that the only unfixable thing we have to worry about when it comes to our children and our families is death. Then we really don't have to worry because they are happy and in God's hands anyway.

That is what it means to live in the resurrection—we have hope for things yet unseen, for God’s action in our lives in God’s time and for the promise of eternal life. I could pass through the grief of losing my mother because of the hope and the promise that we will one day be reunited in heaven. What more could we want? Sadly, human and as selfish as I can be, I always want more, but I am working on be satisfied with reasonable happiness—no matter what life brings.

#3. What are the implications to the persistence in prayer Jesus preaches? I know from my own experience that persistence in prayer strengthens the soul. When I have to wait for God to respond, patience grows in me, tenacity is strengthened, and if I am faithful in that prayer, hope increases.

So many times over the past decade I have been heard to praise God for marvelous miracle in my son’s life as a result of some temporary breakthrough, only to be heartbroken again watching his next crash.

In the early days I thought God was silent, unyielding and thus uncaring. I have learned that God has gifted us with virtues that we could not have gleaned any other way. I have been forced to see God’s presence in the insanity of a beautiful young man whose entire existence, while often times is completely and utterly delusional, is nevertheless rooted in and grounded in an intimacy with God that I could only hope to achieve.

I am confused by his intimacy, not able to distinguish it from reality and psychosis. I am only able to discern the authentic elements of it because of the absolute truth he expresses and the wisdom that flows from that truth—even in the midst of insanity.

I think of the utter brilliance and beauty of Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” and I realize that he created that masterpiece in the throes of a psychotic episode, as he too was schizophrenic. If so brilliant a masterpiece could be borne out of insanity, then the greatest masterpiece of all—profound, intimate, ongoing prayer in the life of my child is the greatest masterpiece for which anyone dare hope to achieve in a life time.

Prayer has helped me see the gift and the beauty in my child’s relationship with God.

Do I pray for God to heal my child? Yes. Prayer, however, has brought about healing in me. It is a great teacher. I have learned that I must hang on, I must entrust him to God’s care and I must believe that God loves my child as much as I do. He is in God’s care—no matter what happens to him. It is only through persistent prayer that I have come to that realization. In the early days of the illness, I said it; it is not until later years of ongoing prayer that I now believe it.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Prayer
Morality
Moral Decision Making
Sin

Kingdom of God
Jesus Christ
Revelation I or II
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

PRAYER

In today's Gospel Jesus teaches his disciples the meaning of prayer and he taught them how to pray. Jesus insists that prayer is an integral element in establishing the reign of God on earth—a new way of living and being in the world. If we are to remain faithful to his teaching we must foster our intimate relationship with him. The only way this is accomplished is through prayer. Thus the focus of our extended session today will be PRAYER.

MORALITY

Paul continues his catechism on salvation—salvation is only through Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves by strict adherence to the Law. We are saved through the cross and resurrection of Christ. As a result of so great a gift we can do no less than live a moral life, pleasing to God. Thus, it is a most appropriate time to consider what the Church means when it speaks of morality—a just way of living and being in the world. The focus of today's extended doctrinal session will be MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Paul continues his catechism on salvation—salvation is only through Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves by strict adherence to the Law. We are saved through the cross and resurrection of Christ. As a result of so great a gift we can do no less than live a moral life, pleasing to God. In order to establish the reign of God and live according to the moral imperatives of the Gospel, we must learn what it means to make a moral decision based on the teaching of Christ and the Scriptures. Thus, today would be a most appropriate time to focus our attention in the extended session on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

SIN

Jesus prays that we be delivered from the temptations we face in our every day life. He teaches us that we must pray to be delivered from the test. It is important that we understand what it means to place ourselves outside of God's love. We cut ourselves off from God through grievous sin, even though God is eagerly waiting for our conversion and homecoming. It is therefore important that we take time out to reflect on sin so we know what it is that we must avoid. Today our doctrinal extended session will focus on what the Church teaches about SIN.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he continues to remind the Gospel what it means to be a disciple in his kingdom. He upsets apple carts and conventional ideas of how the world should be and invites new way of living and being in the world. Today he teaches us that prayer is an essential element in establishing his kingdom on earth. Today would be an appropriate occasion to focus our attention on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

JESUS CHRIST

Each Sunday would be an appropriate time to reflect on Jesus the Christ. Today is a most appropriate time as Jesus is front and center as Lord, teacher, Master and Son of the Father. Thus, today our extended session will be on JESUS CHRIST.

REVELATION I or II

Jesus reveals his intimacy with his Father in his discourse with the disciples. The entire Gospel is revelatory—that is, it seeks to reveal God to believers. Today would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on REVELATION.

EUCCHARIST SERIES

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.